

*"Americans with Disabilities don't want your pity or your lethal mercy. We want freedom. We want LIFE."*  
— Not Dead Yet

In the Self-Advocacy Movement, the role of the support person is an important accommodation. Some people need assistance with personal care and transportation; in Self-Advocacy, this relationship may be that of advisor, facilitator, or friend. The key to this role is to support, not control.



Rev. Wade Blank, one of the founders of ADAPT.



Jack Kevorkian, the former Michigan pathologist who illegally practiced "physician-assisted suicide." "Dr. Death," as he was tagged by many activists in the disability community, finally went too far and killed Thomas Youk on video, administering a lethal drug for the prime time audiences of "60 Minutes." In March 1999, Kevorkian was convicted of second-degree murder and delivery of an uncontrolled substance. He is now in jail, serving 10-25 years.

Many activists with disabilities see Dr. Singer's argument as a slippery slope back to the Eugenics Movement.



A 1991 survey (Public attitudes toward People with Disabilities, Louis Harris), found that "pity, embarrassment, fear, anger, and resentment are the marks of a people whose conscience is bothering them and who desperately need to learn how to treat those with disabilities with equality."



Psychiatric survivors, activists, and allies protest incarceration and forced treatment, including electroshock and psychotropic drugs.



Professor Peter Singer, appointed head of the Bio-Ethics Department of Princeton University, has theorized that "killing a disabled baby is not the moral equivalent of killing a person."

**PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES FACE NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS AS AMERICA'S LARGEST MINORITY.**

Valerie Schaaf, one of the early leaders in self-advocacy. Inspired by the advocacy and civil and human rights groups of the 1960s, and formed partly in reaction to professional and parental attitudes, self-advocacy groups formed their own organizations at the local, state, and national levels.

Self-advocacy means advocating for one's self, standing up for one's rights. For thousands around the world it is also a term of personal identity, focusing on one's political power and right to self-determination. It is also a growing civil rights movement, representing women and men of all races, colors, and religions who have been systematically neglected, abused, incarcerated, and misunderstood for most of history.



Most professionals and parents believed that persons with developmental disabilities should be protected at all costs. Dr. Benji Nirje disagreed: "To be allowed to be human means to be allowed to fail." By listening to people with developmental disabilities, Dr. Nirje and others discovered that individuals themselves, not professionals and parents, know best what they want in life.

In response to continuing images of pity, particularly in telethons, self-advocates helped to redefine the disability problem by asserting it as a matter of rights, not charity.

Self-advocacy groups have recognized the need for support — through advice, encouragement, assistance with daily living and transportation — and have described the role of the support person as that of advisor, facilitator, and friend. The relationship is one of mutual trust, understanding, and respect. The key to being an effective support person is to support, not control.



Back in the 1940s, Jacobus ten Broek changed the name of the Federation for the Blind to the Federation of the Blind. In similar fashion, the self-advocacy movement was telling parents it was now time for people to speak for themselves.

**NOT BEING ABLE TO SPEAK IS NOT THE SAME AS NOT HAVING ANYTHING TO SAY**



**1972**  
The New York State Association for Retarded Citizens brings a class action suit against the state of New York, alleging severe violations at the Willowbrook State School and Hospital.  
Section 504 (Public Law 92-603) is added to the Rehabilitation Act, forbidding employment discrimination against people with developmental disabilities in federally funded programs.

**1972**  
The Center for Independent Living opens in Berkeley, California.  
England holds a national conference sponsored by the Spastics Society and organized by the Campaign for the Mentally Handicapped.

**1973**  
Canada holds its first self-advocacy conference.

**1974**  
Disabled Women's Coalition founded at UC Berkeley by Susan Sygall and Deborah Kaplan.  
Self-advocates in Oregon and Washington State organize the first U.S. self-advocacy conference.  
*Wyatt v. Aderholt* Federal Court rules that Alabama's eugenic sterilization law is unconstitutional.

**1977**  
Activists take over the San Francisco offices of the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to protest Secretary Joseph Califano's refusal to sign meaningful regulations for Section 504. The action became the longest sit-in of a federal building to date. The historic demonstrations were successful and the 504 regulations were finally signed.

**1975**  
The United Nations adopts a Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons.